



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

Breaking Open the Word  
Mary Birmingham

## Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A



Ivan Aivazovsky's painting *Walking on Water* (1888)



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### OPENING PRAYER

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

### PRAYER OF SAINT ANSELM

*O Lord, You are my Lord and my God,  
yet I have never seen You.  
You have created and redeemed me,  
and have conferred on me all my goods,  
yet I do not know You.  
I was created in order that I might know You,  
but I have not yet attained the goal of my creation.  
I confess, O Lord, and give You thanks,  
that You have created me in Your image,  
so that I might be mindful of You  
and contemplate You and love You.  
I seek not to understand in order that I may believe;  
rather, I believe in order that I may understand.  
I am desperate for Your love, Lord.  
My heart is aflame with fervent passion.  
When I remember the good things You have done,  
my heart burns with desire to embrace You.  
I thirst for You;  
I hunger for You;  
I long for You;  
I sigh for You.  
I am jealous of Your love.  
The joy of my heart turns to dust.  
My happy laughter is reduced to ashes.  
I want You.  
I hope for You.  
My soul is like a widow,  
bereft of You.  
Turn to me,  
and see my tears.  
Come now, Lord, and I will be comforted.  
Show me Your face,  
and I shall be saved.  
Enter my room, and I shall be satisfied.  
Reveal Your beauty,  
and my joy will be complete.*

Catholic  
**Faith, Life  
& Creed**  
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## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy is an invitation to grow in faith.
- ▶ It is also a meditation on God's ongoing salvation—God's saving power through his Son, Jesus.
- ▶ Today's liturgy is a reminder that regardless of the tempests of life, Christ is present to guide, lead, encourage and offer his loving compassion.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

## Reading: 1 Kings 19, 9. 11-13

- ▶ Today's reading from the Book of Kings reflects one of the most dramatic stories in the Old Testament.
- ▶ Elijah killed Queen Jezebel's prophets of the pagan god Baal.
- ▶ She promised revenge and set out to kill Elijah.
- ▶ Fearing for his life Elijah fled into the desert with Jezebel in hot pursuit.
- ▶ An earlier pericope portrays Elijah weary from his ordeal. Overcome with self-pity, he stopped along the way to pray for death.
- ▶ God sent an angel to comfort him and tell him to eat the hearth cakes the angel provided, lest Elijah become too weary for the journey ahead of him.
- ▶ Like his Israelite ancestors before him, Elijah was nurtured and nourished by the hand of God as he sojourned in the desert.
- ▶ Elijah's forty-day journey led him ultimately to the Lord's mountain, Mount Horeb.
- ▶ He sought safe haven in a nearby cave.
- ▶ Old Testament Scriptures attest to God who was manifest in the elements of nature such as clouds, fire, light, thunder, earthquake and wind.
- ▶ Later in Israel's history as their nomadic life was replaced by an agrarian culture God was experienced and manifest in the Temple with the understanding that God could not be contained in any human edifice.
- ▶ Even though God was usually manifest in dramatic, powerful ways, in this encounter God's presence was manifest in a silent whisper.
- ▶ God's soft, gentle, quiet presence contrasted with the thunderous display of power shown by Baal, the storm god. God need not show his power in such ostentatious ways.
- ▶ Regardless of whether God is the God of the tempest or God of the silent, small, still voice, today's pericope highlights the truth that God is the God of all creation and is Lord over all.
- ▶ Yes, we encounter God in the powerful manifestations of nature, but also in the quiet recesses of our hearts.

- ▶ Elijah's encounter compelled him to go out and proclaim the Good News to the people.
- ▶ Elijah's story parallels Moses'. Both fled for their lives, both complained to God. Both lost faith in God's people.
- ▶ God was faithful to Elijah and promised him that his plan of salvation would go forward as ordained. God would remain faithful to the covenant.
- ▶ Keeping in mind that no one could look at the face of God and live, Elijah hid his face from the Lord.
- ▶ Elijah followed the Lord's command and went forth to fulfill his divinely appointed mission. He appointed Elisha to succeed him.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life.

- ▶ What touched you the most in this story of Elijah?
- ▶ Have you ever experienced the presence of God in your life? Please explain.
- ▶ How has God been manifest to you in grand, profound ways or in silent quiet ways, as in today's reading from the Book of Kings?
- ▶ What can we learn from today's reading? What does it teach us about God's relationship with us?
- ▶ What are the implications of this reading for our life of discipleship?
- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?

## Second Reading: Romans 9, 1-5

- ▶ Paul speaks to his fellow Israelites not as an outsider but as a fellow Jew.
- ▶ He cannot contain his disappointment in their failure to recognize the new covenant unfolding before them.
- ▶ They were the chosen ones of God and should have understood what God was doing in Christ.
- ▶ They were the intended beneficiaries, yet they refused to accept the new covenant God was forging with his people.
- ▶ Paul's disillusionment with the people is palpable.
- ▶ He would willingly offer his own salvation if only the people would acknowledge the new covenant.
- ▶ Paul reminds the people why they should have recognized the Messiah.
- ▶ God had been preparing them for generations. They were God's own people. They were the privileged ones who experienced God's presence throughout salvation history. They were principal heirs of the covenant.
- ▶ They were promised a future Messiah. How in the world could they have been so blind?



## Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ What is the lesson for us in today's reading from Romans?
- ▶ In what way, if any, does this speak to your life of faith in God?
- ▶ Have you ever been blind to some truth you failed to recognize? What did you learn from the experience?
- ▶ What are the implications in this reading for Christian discipleship?
- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?

## Gospel: Matthew 14, 22-33

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
  
- ▶ Each evangelist proclaims the stories of Jesus according to the needs of his particular community.
- ▶ Mark's disciples do not understand the implications of Jesus walking on water.
- ▶ Matthew's version is slightly different.
- ▶ He retells today's miracle story within the context of the focus of this section of his Gospel. Unlike the disciples in Mark's Gospel, Matthew's disciples make a profession of faith.
- ▶ Matthew includes a conversation between Jesus and Peter and he tells the story of Peter walking on water.
- ▶ Last week signaled a shift from Matthew's focus on the reign of God to his focus on the Church.
- ▶ Today's miracle story is told with that context in mind.
- ▶ The boat is an image of the Church. Matthew's focus now turns to the mission of the Church.
- ▶ The storm evokes the suffering Church--the persecution disciples can expect as they go forth to establish the mission of Christ.
- ▶ Matthew exalts the risen Christ who walks with his disciples and who saves all who profess their faith in him.
- ▶ Jesus invited Peter to a new level of faith and trust.
- ▶ Jesus called to Peter; he was afraid; Christ rebuked his fear.
- ▶ The Sea of Galilee is known for violent storms due to the physical surroundings of the area. It is close to seven hundred feet below sea level. The *sea* is actually a large lake measuring thirteen miles long and eight miles wide. The tropical nature of the area causes rapid change in wind currents. Summer heat mixed with changing weather and wind patterns can cause sudden tempests to erupt.
- ▶ Jesus instructed the disciples to go out in the boat.
- ▶ The storm itself was of no great import. The way the storm ended is indeed miraculous.
- ▶ Chapter eight of Matthew's Gospel proclaims another instance in which Jesus demonstrates power and authority over stormy waters.
- ▶ Today's pericope has Jesus walking on the water. The water and storm miracles echo the Old Testament prophets and psalmists who declare that God has power over the troubled waters, the storm and the sea (Job 9:8, Psalm 77: 17-20 and Isaiah 43:16).
- ▶ Matthew obviously makes the connection that Jesus is the Divine Messiah—he is



God who has power and authority over all creation.

- ▶ Jesus answers, “It is I.” His response reflects the Divine Name given to Moses on Mount Sinai—“*ego eimi*,” God said, “It is I.”
- ▶ Throughout Scripture when God manifests himself to human beings it is called a theophany. When God manifests himself in a theophany he always tells the recipient of his presence not to be afraid.
- ▶ When Jesus says, “fear not” Matthew wants his readers to take note: This event—Jesus walking on water—is a theophany. Jesus is demonstrating his Divine power; Jesus is God.
- ▶ The Divine Christ is the Messiah who has come to care for God’s people.
- ▶ Wide-spread belief in spirits was prevalent in first century Palestine. The only way to protect oneself from the power of spirits to wreak havoc with the elements and with the self was to come under the protection of a more powerful spirit.
- ▶ Jesus, the Divine Christ, Jesus, God’s agent is that more powerful Spirit. Jesus controls the elements and has authority over the power of evil.
- ▶ Jesus went off to pray; his ensuing miracle later than evening is a result of that prayer. Jesus, God’s Son, trusted God’s authority transmitted to him to calm the storm.
- ▶ *What about Peter’s role in this Gospel?*
- ▶ Peter is known for his passion, and his impulsiveness. He obviously holds a position of authority among the other disciples.
- ▶ In spite of his exalted position, he is also the very human disciple who demonstrates doubt and who asks for signs and verifications.
- ▶ Jesus invited Peter out of the boat. Peter leaped out at Jesus’ command. Jesus empowered him to do the impossible. As long as he kept his focus on Jesus, he too walked on water; as soon as he wavered he started to sink into the abyss. He cried out in the words of every poor soul who begs for help, “Save me Lord.”
- ▶ Peter is an icon for all of us who falter in faith and cry out to be saved.
- ▶ He is the patron saint of those who initially embrace a vibrant faith and then falter when the challenges of life come crashing down.
- ▶ He reminds us that when all is lost we have a Savior who reaches out his hand to us and tells us to “fear not.”
- ▶ Torrential waters will never engulf us if we keep our focus on the Christ who saves.
- ▶ Faith is a living, dynamic organic reality that must be called upon when crisis finds its way into our lives.
- ▶ One only needs “little” faith to bolster great doubt.
- ▶ Faith and doubt can be expected in the Christian life. Grace is the antidote to doubt and the healing balm of faith.
- ▶ The bottom line for Christians in this Gospel is to trust Jesus to be a living, dynamic, protective presence in the Church of all ages.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing a story from his or her life. See appendix for an example.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this Gospel?
- ▶ How have you been called upon to do the impossible only to find God's grace working in your life?
- ▶ How have you experienced the healing and saving power of Jesus in your life?
- ▶ What does Matthew want you to learn from today's Gospel?
- ▶ If this Gospel is a call to faith and trust, what evidence is there in your life that you have grown and continue to grow in faith?
- ▶ In what way does this Gospel speak to a situation in your own life?
- ▶ What can we learn from Peter in today's Gospel?
- ▶ Why is he such a wonderful icon for us as we walk the journey of faith?
- ▶ Why is Peter a sign of hope for the average believer?
- ▶ What is the message for the Church in today's Gospel? What evidence is there that we as Church have learned and continue to learn from this Gospel?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

### Concluding Prayer

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.



## APPENDIX

- If this Gospel is a call to faith and trust what evidence is there in your life that you have grown and continue to grow in faith?

I am recovering from the most miraculous event of my life. My son just sacrificed his kidney for me and I now have his kidney to keep me alive. It has been a remarkable journey of faith. God spiritually prepared me for this major event in my life. I approached it with a faith that only God can give. I trusted in the outcome no matter what that might be. I knew I was in God's hands. He asked me to step out of the boat and keep my eyes on him. For the first time in my life I did as I was told every step of the way. I was at complete peace regardless of the myriad of complications and obstacles that we met along the way. Even in the midst of recovery and the two steps forward, one step back process that it is, whenever I am tempted to feel sorry for myself, I am reminded of the great gift I have been given and the amazing presence of God that has sustained me throughout the ordeal.

The four days I spent in intensive care was a contemplative theophany of intimate relationship with my God. The love of family and friends has also been the manifested presence of God to me. My son gave me his kidney and my daughter has literally put her life on hold to take care of me since caring for a new kidney is a full time job for the first three months. She is caring for me with great tenderness and amazing love. I am so blessed. God has demonstrated his love for my family and me over and over again. So many times he asks me to step out of the boat. When I respond in faith, God is there to pick me up. He is even there when I don't believe as fully as I should



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

## Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 19, 9. 11-13 | Romans 9, 1-5 | Matthew 14, 22-33

Miracles  
Evangelization  
Prayer  
Anointing of the Sick

Faith  
Salvation  
Jesus Christ  
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well. Choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

### MIRACLES

Today's liturgy is a good opportunity to reflect on the miracles of Jesus. Jesus calmed the storm-tossed sea and displayed his divine power to his disciples. He invited Peter to leave the security of the boat and walk across the water to him. Peter reminds us of the doubt we all experience at some point in our lives even though we experience Jesus' miracles in large and small ways throughout our lives. It is thus fitting that we focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about MIRACLES.

### EVANGELIZATION

Elijah experienced God in the small still voice and then went forward and preached the Good News of God's salvation. We too are to listen for God's voice in our hearts and then respond to the word of God. We are to go out and share what God has spoken to our hearts and in God's word. The miracle of Jesus' divine manifestation in the storm tossed boat is reason enough to go forward and preach the good news of Jesus. It is thus a most appropriate time for us to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

### PRAYER

In today's liturgy Elijah hears the small still voice of God. The disciples are tossed about in the storm at sea and rely on the power of Christ to save them. We are also told that Jesus went off to pray. Prayer is the heart of Jesus' ministry and the heart of today's entire ministry. We call on God in Christ to save us and speak to us midst all of life's experiences. Prayer keeps us vigilant and attentive to the voice of God within and a habit of prayer gives us the ability to recognize the voice of God when he calls. It is thus most fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches us about PRAYER.

### **ANOINTING OF THE SICK.**

Peter cried, "Save me, Lord", as he started to sink. His cry sounds very much like the cry of all those who came to Jesus begging for healing. We all have moments in our lives where we call on God to save us. That same cry goes forth today when we come before God asking to be healed of our illnesses and strengthened to remain steadfast and not lost heart or faith in the midst of illness. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about the sacrament of ANOINTING OF THE SICK.

### **FAITH**

Peter, who witnessed the miracles of Christ on a regular basis, doubted in Jesus' power to save him. He is a reminder to us that doubt is a natural part of the Christian walk. We are called to have faith, but it is Christ who strengthens that faith within us. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about FAITH.

### **SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY**

Today's Gospel is a story of salvation par excellence. Jesus reminds his disciples that he is the long awaited Christ. His miracles point to his divine origin. He is the Christ who came to save the world. Peter echoes that cry to be saved. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

### **JESUS CHRIST**

Today's liturgy proclaims the divine Christ who demonstrated his divine origin by his miracle of calming the storm-tossed sea. He teaches his disciples whom he truly is—the Son of God who has come to save the world. This liturgy is thus a most fitting opportunity to focus our attention on what we believe about JESUS CHRIST.

### **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.